



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Workshop

A Monthly Journal, devoted to Progress of the Useful Arts

EDITED BY
PROF. W. BAUMER, I. SCHNORR AND OTHERS.

VOL. II.

N^o. 10.

MAJOLICA.*

By MR. JACOB FALKE.

In point of color and decorative effect, the Gubbio-ware of this first period is, as we have already stated, the most excellent of all majolica manufactures. No other reaches the depth and richness of color of those bowls and plates which Maestro Georgio adorned with his golden arabesques on dark blue grounds. The factory of Urbino, which could not compete with this decorative treatment, and perhaps, on account of an alteration in taste, did not desire to do so, struck out another style of ornamentation, and during a short period of time, produced those brilliant works which are generally considered as the head and crown of all majolica manufactures. It substituted design for color, and in this substitution consists the great peculiarity of the second and best period.

Not however that color was altogether laid aside or neglected, only the highest value was attached to the excellence of the figure-subjects and their perfect execution. The shades of color were rather restricted, consisting only of green, yellow, blue, violet, black and white, so that no perfectly pictorial success, at all events no faithful imitation of nature, was attained, or perhaps even attempted. The artist was obliged always to consider how he was to do this or that with his color, whence it happens that we find the flesh tints usually shaded with yellow or green, violet, blue and black. The same reason, namely the poverty of the pallet, gives to the majolica, when looked upon in the mass, almost an impression of monotony, for there is always in large groups the same tone of color, only stronger in some,

weaker in others, and even this difference is to be attributed more to the different epochs of production than to particular specimens or manufactories. Hence it follows, almost of necessity, that in most majolicas the painting, owing to the process of manufacture, is hasty and therefore often deficient in design and execution, and we need not be surprised that there are many lovers of art, and those of no mean intelligence, who are altogether without enthusiasm for majolica. And yet these works have their picturesque charm. The limitation of resource has not always proved a disadvantage in Art-Industry; it has often guarded against extravagance and led to a definite style, or more intense development of power. So it is here. The colors which are at the command of the majolica-painter allow of a very beautiful and powerful harmony; the yellow-green or green-blue tint of extreme depth and richness that characterises the majolicas of the best period is most pleasing and ornamental, and it may be easily conceived that if a buffet is garnished with majolica, in a dining-room with red or dark brown decoration, the effect will be excellent and imposing, while it will be of little consequence whether the design of some specimen is hastily or perfectly executed. This favorable result is owing to the peculiar enamel in which the colors lie embedded and which gives them that limpidity, depth and transparency which are the properties of deep and clear water. In comparison with these, painted porcelains appear dry, hard and opaque, and the more so, the higher their pretensions are.

Neither artists nor amateurs, however, during this period looked herein for its chief charm, though it certainly entered into their regard and consideration, but,

* see p. 129 ante.
The Workshop. 1869.

as we have already said, in the richness and beauty of the representations upon it. The circle of such representations, therefore, became considerably enlarged, and embraced indeed the whole province over which painting presides. The purely ornamental embellishments were retained as peculiar to the mezza-majolica but they were more richly elaborated both in idea and execution; and then there pressed in all that flood of fantastic arabesques and grotesques which had had so charming and delightful a beginning with Raphael, or rather before him, and ended afterwards with the most varied, the most unmeaning and tasteless agglomeration of all possible things. While indeed the best period of majolica lasted, there reigned in the arrangement of these ingredients an artistically conceived order, and a certain grace which lent its charm to their loose and light play.

Another thing retained was the half-length portrait, especially on bowls and plates for marriage presents, on which were very suitable represented portraits of the happy pair. And then there opened up to the majolica-painter the numberless representations from Sacred History and Mythology, which then became the principal and most characteristic objects of embellishment. Subjects were found also in ancient history and sometimes, though rarely, in contemporary events, though even these were to be seen on dishes and plates, as, for example, the taking of Tunis by Charles V.

These changes introduced of necessity an entirely different class of artists into the majolica manufacture. Till now decorative painting had been sufficient, and the ornament approved even by the artistically educated eye which would indeed be offended by badly executed figures. Assuredly very few of the majolica pictures were original compositions but rather copies on plates, vessels and bowls, of the known and celebrated creations of the best masters of those times. Hence it was that Duke Guidobaldo sought to provide his factory at Urbino with the greatest possible number of Raphael's cartoons and sketches, and took great pains to secure the drawings of other great artists. The engravings of Marc Anton and others were added to this collection. Hence we can understand how it is that we meet with that extraordinary number of Raphael's compositions in majolica which gave to it as a byword the name of Raphael-ware. We shall however greatly err, if we suppose that Raphael, as is commonly said, and as the happy possessor so willingly believes, has painted a single one of these plates; they originated altogether after his death. He could not possibly have painted in Urbino, except as a little child, before he went to Perugia to the school of Pietro Perugino, and this was long before the best period of the Urbino manufacture.

Though the pictures on the majolicas were for the most part copies, still the progress of art required that they should be well drawn and to a certain degree well executed, as far as the difficulties of the art, and the nature of the material, especially of the colors, permitted. Above all therefore Duke Guidobaldo sought to employ good draughtsmen in his factories, and first of

all invited Battista Franco from Venice, who remained with him for a long while as one of the principal artists, and produced many designs for the majolicas, especially the before named arabesques *à la Raphael* which were all attributed to the Urbino factory. In 1560 after having spent almost twenty years in the factories of the Duke at Pesaro and Urbino he returned to Venice.

Another and perhaps the most celebrated artist of Urbino was Orazio Fontana, the most important member of a whole family of pottery painters. In the execution of the designs and in enamel painting he has no equal, so that the numerous works which bear his signature are still highly prized. He was a fellow worker with Battista Franco, from 1540 to 1560. With these two may especially be named Raphael dal Colle, whose Christian name in connection with majolica has contributed to the error mentioned above, and Francesco Xanto Avelli born in Rovigo, but who settled and distinguished himself in Urbino, and whose works are characteristic of the best period. His drawing is correct, his coloring rich, his flesh tints yellow relieved with white, the drapery blue or yellow, the hair of the female figures fair, the leaves of the trees a blueish green, the light upon them a pale green, the stems black with yellow, which are indeed the usual colors in by far the greater part of the majolicas of this time. The younger brothers and nephews of Orazio as well as Giacomo San Franco and others pass into the era of the decline.

Whatever value and importance the artists of the best period, and with them their princely Mæcenases and amateurs, attached to the painting, it is not this which forms in our eyes the only or most highly prized characteristic of majolica. Another thing to which we have to direct our attention in those vessels and utensils is the form, which we must consider as original though not always successful, and yet certainly most rich in instruction and worthy of careful study. The pottery of the Middle Ages did not stand high in any artistic sense, but it broke away from the traditions of the Antique pottery, it presented no direct reminiscences whatever of the charming and perfect forms of Grecian earthenware, and if they show nevertheless anything in common it was suggested by the very material and workmanship. With the revival of art in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, no new discoveries gave any impetus to pottery, as they had done to Architecture and Sculpture, and partly also to Painting. The paintings of the Thermæ of Titus, discovered in the time of Raphael, called into existence a new kind of surface ornamentation, but the admirable productions of Athenian and Grecian pottery still reposed in the bowels of the earth. So, too, the earthenware manufactures of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, if they were to surpass the somewhat rough ware of the Middle Ages as well as Spanish-Arabian models were left to the resources of their own genius, and had only to rely on the highly refined taste which distinguished the Italian nation at this time.

It is owing to these circumstances that in the Italian majolicas, and more especially in the pottery of the six-

teenth century, an immense profusion of forms is at our command as patterns for the revival of this branch of Art-Industry, not indeed equalling the Classico-Antique either in richness, or in perfection of beauty and delicacy, but in return, much more adapted to modern requirement and our present material. First we may consider the flat articles, dishes and plates, the shapes and lines of which are often spoilt by the prevailing reminiscences of the Rococo style. In respect of the breadth and form of the rim, its proportions to the bowl and the depth of the latter, we may study with advantage the old majolicas, bearing in mind however that our usual material the porcelain, or its inferior earthenware substitute, by its greater solidity and hardness allows a greater thinness and altogether a greater delicacy of treatment. By the adoption of porcelain instead of majolica we ought to have improved instead of deteriorating in form, which has, alas, been too commonly the case.

Of still more artistic worth are the upright articles, such as bottles, jugs, ewers, vases, candlesticks, inkstands, saltcellars, etc., as in these a richer refinement in form is possible, and indeed has taken place. The objects of this kind which still remain for our study are as numerous as they are varied, and although many of them trench on the Rococo, being of a style rather overcharged and licentious, still they present an abundance of forms rich in instruction and worthy our best attention, and a mass of motives which might be very happily realized in our present pottery and especially in the manufacture of our vessels. Although in those objects, the painting especially, and then the relief ornaments are the principal decorative features, there may still be recognised throughout the unmistakeable intention to give an artistic finish to the outline, to enrich it by a harmonious variety of mouldings, to relieve the sway of the lines by the judicious addition of a handle and thus to render the vessel a genuine work of art. It is not, however, every production of the majolica manufacture, even in the short period of its perfection, that is to be taken as a model, and still more must we emphatically call attention to the faults which are to be avoided. These consist chiefly in an unskilful and injudicious style of painting, incongruous with plastic forms, or with the structure of the vessels. We must indeed confess that it was at the very best period of majolica manufacture that too much use was made of the painting, and that it was quite contrary to all feeling and nature of art that dishes and plates and other articles of common use, and that too just on the spot they are most used, should be decorated with pictures of figures and even sacred subjects. Such treatment is contrary to all propriety, even if the articles are not themselves taken into use, but are merely to adorn sideboards and chests. At those times, however, this feeling of criticism did not exist, and so we may, as of old, delight our eye with the pictorial charm of these objects.

But another thing which ought to have been more seriously considered is, as we have said, the structure and moulding of the vessel. A plate consists of the rim,

the bend and the central flat surface. Due regard must be had to each of these three members, if their ornamentation is to be successful and faultless. In numerous instances this has been carefully observed by the majolica painters, and there are many specimens of this kind which are excellent in their effect. But in no less numerous cases, even where the painting is often of the very best, this principle has been neglected, and one and the same figurative representation runs through the whole set, without regard to corner, rim, bend or bowl, so that the general impression is at all events very confusing. Still more inappropriate does the treatment appear, in basins, vases, and jugs where figures and landscapes extend over handles and stoppers, so as not to be, even in the last mentioned case, continuous, an error which should be carefully avoided.

Nor was the second period of majolica manufacture, the period of its greatest perfection, free from this fault, nay it was especially tainted with it. The third period, that of its decline, beginning from about 1560, or 1570 is both in this and other respects less remarkable for faults than for excellences. It may be observed in general as the characteristic of the decline of majolica, that the painting is inferior, the design rougher and less artistic, the coloring paler and the general impression less striking; moreover the objects being less important receive more of the every day life and rural character and not unfrequently copy the Dutch copper-prints and etchings of that kind. Meanwhile the factories with their specialities diverge in other ways; at all events they become more numerous through the fact of artists and workmen abandoning the sinking factory of Urbino, and commencing new ones in other places. In the most flourishing period the productions of the great Ducal factories of Urbino, Casteldurante, and Pesaro are hardly to be distinguished from one another. Gubbio only preserved its special individuality through Maestro Giorgio. We may mention also Faenza, where the workmanship was for a long time exceedingly celebrated, and became so important as to give the name of *faïence* to this kind of ware. Some peculiarities were also attributed to it, though it is doubtful, as is generally the case in this branch of art, whether they belong to it alone. In Pesaro, the favourite specialities in majolica were reliefs and plastic objects, and in the year 1569 Giacomo Lanfranco obtained here a patent from Duke Guidobaldo II. for the application of gold on decorations, not after the manner of the metallic lustre of Gubbio, or of the mezzamajolica, but as on the porcelains of the present day. Such application of gold was however produced in other factories, e. g., in those of the Abruzzi.

These manufactories of Naples and the Abruzzi form, in the period of decadence and especially in the seventeenth century, an equally important group with those of Urbino, and an immense number of works have proceeded from them. With Naples, Castelli in the Abruzzi forms the centre of manufacture, and whole families of pottery painters settled here, viz., the Grues, Gentile, Capellati and Fuina. The works from these factories

are weak in effect, pale and yellowish-green in color, but in other respects carefully made and not without a certain tastefulness; they represent, those of Pietro da Cortona especially, figurative scenes, landscape, allegories, hunting and sea pieces, animals and flowers. In 1740 there existed still four and forty factories of this kind; they afterwards however passed into crockery-ware factories (*faïence*) or like those of Capo di Monte in Naples, into porcelain establishments. Other factories were commenced in the period of decadence at Florence and other parts of Tuscany. Venice had also hers, though she was obliged to procure her material from Pesaro. The Venetian majolicas have this peculiarity that they are exceedingly light, and have a clear ringing sound. They have also very frequently a border with ornaments in relief, hollow underneath, so as to give them the appearance of being produced by impression. Genoa also had an important factory which however gave itself up entirely to the manufacture of crockery-ware or *faïence*, after the Franco-Dutch manner.

Such was indeed the fate of the whole majolica manufacture; it was compelled to give way everywhere to the glazed white earthenware, and so fell entirely into neglect. It is true that from the beginning of the sixteenth century there had been majolicas covered with white enamel, for in Urbino, Lucca della Robbia's tin glaze had been used, and with Raphael's arabesques had produced a fine and still highly esteemed article. But this was very different from the hard, thin and delicate Eastern porcelain, which was white and ringing and formed one solid mass with the enamel. The China-Japanese originals, many of which had been imported, were too costly to be practical rivals, but they called into existence, with the white earthenware which came from Holland, and was afterwards produced in great quantities in France, England, Germany and at last in Italy, an imitation which supplanted the genuine majolica in ordinary use, and entirely put a stop to its manufacture at the beginning of the eighteenth century, as the productions of that time were too bad for articles of luxury, and the rich dilettanti gave a most decided preference to the Oriental porcelain.

And thus the old and better executed pieces remained as antiques, partly as heirlooms, partly in cabinets and collections, partly passing as presents from one amateur to another, till we have at last seen the manufacture re-appear, first as forgeries and then as avowed imitations. The last exhibitions have shown us how excellently and to what extent this has succeeded. France, Belgium, Portugal, England, Sweden and Italy have all exhibited specimens in Paris in 1867. Till then it had been thought that at least the mother-of-pearl enamel of the *mezza-majolica* and the metallic lustre of Maestro Giorgio had remained a secret to the painters, but the manufactory of Doccia near Florence exhibited most successful examples of both, and the art is now completely recovered in every respect.

But if majolica manufacture is again to become a flourishing branch of Art-Industry, it must leap over its present point of mere imitation; it must lay hold of those peculiarities which are its rightful property, and at the same time assert the utmost possible independance in form and ornament, according to present requirements. For common use it can never again recover the position it once held in Italy; for porcelain by its greater lightness and purity, its hardness and resistance to heat, possesses such practical advantages that it cannot be banished from our tables. Majolica can only enter into competition with it, by its artistic qualities, the deeper and richer enamel of its colors, and altogether its appearance as an object of art even in its roughest execution. Consequently, however highly majolica may be esteemed, it will always remain an article of luxury and ornament only, but as such it will maintain its rightful position. Any other employment of it, as for drinking cups, for example, or Dinner services, can never be anything but a passing fashion, and can therefore never form a sound foundation for a branch of Art-Industry. In ornaments for the drawing-room, or for chests and cabinets, in certain cases also for the table, for flower vases, small fountains and many other garden ornaments, it will find its appropriate use, and its re-appearance in such a guise will be hailed with a joyful welcome.